



A MESSAGE FROM SDVSOA CHAIRMAN RICHARD

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Veterans and Legislators Roundtable - Watertown

Friday, November 20

In his opening remarks, Warren Aas (American Legion) shared how the creation of the South Dakota Veterans Council was encouraged a number of years ago by Legislators so veterans could better speak in “one voice”. They did come together and the Council is made up of six Congressional authorized veterans groups. It seems to work well because of the 10 legislative actions followed by the Veterans Council all past the 2013-14 Legislature and were signed into law.

Friday’s Roundtable was attended by about 20-30 veterans, 8-10 legislators and the six representatives making up the Council. Each of the members of the Council shared two-four goals for the 2015 SD Legislature backed by their organization. The Paralyzed Veterans of America in SD is proposing a change in the admission rules at the SD Veterans Home in Hot Springs. They are seeking to change the admissions requirements to include all veterans and not just war-time veterans.

The issue surrounding the definition of a veteran was mentioned by several of the groups. There will be an effort to change the SD definition of a veteran toward recognizing all men and women who have taken the oath to defend our nation and have done so honorably. The question some ask, “I don’t know if I am a veteran or not?” may no longer need to be asked if this is changed.

The Disabled American Veterans want to bring forth the question of creating an eastern SD Veterans Home before the Legislature again. Several of the Legislators present spoke to the work done on this issue in the past. The biggest issue, of course, is the need for some funding. Someone mentioned that the new Veterans Home in Hot Springs has a 65% VA (Federal Gov.) payment with the State of SD paying the rest.

One of the issues seeking clarification and action by the SD American Legion is Veterans Preference in governmental hiring. This organization will seek better “guidelines” in carrying out veterans’ preference in job hiring. This topic was mentioned at our fall SDVSOA meeting.

The SD Vietnam Veterans of America are interested in getting more information to the public regarding the effects of Agent Orange exposure.

There was a discussion surrounding Funeral Honors and the importance of the stipend given to local veterans groups.

At the end of the veterans’ group presentations, the Legislators responded. Several of them spoke to their willingness to sponsor legislation to assist in the areas the Council deemed important. Several mentioned they already had sponsored bills in the past and were seeking support from veterans. This included the definition of a veteran, veteran’s license plates and other issues. One of the newly elected Legislators asked the Veterans Council to “help educate me” regarding veterans issues.

At the end, Chairman Aas mentioned the importance of the Roundtables and the chance to meet and speak together before the Legislative Season starts. This was the first of three roundtables held this past week and, hopefully, some of our members were in attendance.

Report prepared by Gordon Richard, President of the SDVSO Association